

## **FY16-20 Consolidated Plan**

### **Summary of Questions and Answers**

**From Event on Thursday, November 21<sup>st</sup> and Received over E-mail or through Registration**

*Updated December 27, 2013*

Below are questions and comments regarding the FY16-20 Consolidated Plan. This list will be updated weekly with new questions and comments that are received.

#### **Affordable Housing Development and Fair Housing**

**Q:** What will be done to address HUD's recent issued rule [sic] regarding the duty to affirmatively further fair housing?

**A:** HUD has recently released a proposed rule that seeks to improve the structure of the fair housing planning process for grantees to access uniform data, better assess fair housing issues and create prioritized goals to overcome them.

Although the proposed rule is not yet regulation, Newton and the WestMetro HOME Consortium are currently revising the existing analysis to create a Consortium-wide fair housing assessment. This assessment will seek to assess many of the goals the proposed rule hopes to achieve such as improving integrated living patterns; overcoming historic patterns of segregation; reducing concentrations of poverty; reducing disparities in access to community assets; and responding to disproportionate housing needs.

**Q:** Does the B'nai B'rith housing plan [sic] give priority to Jewish community members?

**A:** No, the B'nai B'rith proposal for a mixed-use development at Austin Street does not give priority to any population; they provide equal opportunity to all eligible residents.

**Q:** What is the plan to spread affordable housing to all neighborhoods in Newton instead of locating them in lower income neighborhoods?

**A:** Affordable housing development is a function of several factors, including the price and availability of real estate; funding availability and caps (limits); and zoning restraints or incentives. Ideally, affordable housing of all types should be well integrated into the community and have access to transportation, jobs, amenities, public services and recreation. One goal of the Consolidated Plan is to identify strategies that will create such opportunities citywide.

- Q:** Is there any information related to incentives offered to homeowners to sell or donate their homes to the city or entity for the purpose of creating affordable housing?
- A:** The city could accept donated property subject to acceptance by the Board of Aldermen for the purpose of creating affordable housing. We are conducting further research into what incentives might exist.
- Q:** There appears to be an increasing and troubling opposition to siting affordable housing in Newton for all types of populations, especially for the disabled, homeless and minority populations. With Mayor Warren's decision to prematurely terminate the community review process in the Engine 6 development and further delay other affordable housing proposals, how will we be addressing both the community review process and these housing needs in a fair and responsible manner using our valuable federal funding resources, CDBG and HOME, going forward?
- A:** Newton Planning and Development Department staff have been meeting with the chairs and vice chairs of the Newton Housing Partnership, the Fair Housing Committee, the Planning and Development Board (P & D Board), and the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to assess the ways in which these advisory bodies can best assist in evaluating proposals from affordable housing developers seeking public monies and to properly engage the public before funding determinations are made. The discussions have focused on process, the need for education, citizen engagement and notification, noting that at the same time, these efforts must not create impediments to fair and equal housing opportunities for those classes protected under federal or state fair housing laws.

According to the Citizen Participation Plan and past practice, the Planning and Development Board historically has opened the mandatory 30-day public comment period the same night as its public hearing, at which it has typically also voted on the project before the Board. Since Engine 6, the P & D Board has decided to hold open the public hearing during the 30-day comment period so it can consider the public comments before taking action. It then forwards its recommendation to the Mayor, after a more robust discussion. The CPC agreed to joint hearings with the P & D Board and could follow a similar schedule, with a public hearing at one meeting and a vote at the following meeting, and would continue its past practice of forwarding its recommendation to the Board of Aldermen immediately after its vote. This new practice can be incorporated into the Citizen Participation Plan when it is updated.

### **Consolidated Plan Process**

- Q:** I am interested in how nonprofit cultural organizations will fit into the planning process, and how the New Art Center might participate in the discussion.

**A:** All types of nonprofits are welcome to explore synergies and unique partnerships that may further the sharing of knowledge, expertise, and/or resources that enhance the livability and sustainability of our community for the benefit of all. We will continue to notify you of upcoming event and hope you will attend those that interest you.

**Q:** A good way to do a needs assessment of those with low to moderate income is through a survey sampling specifically in the neighborhoods where they live. This survey should go through a development process to ensure that the questions speak to issues important to the target population. As a survey researcher, I'd be glad to work on this with City staff.

**A:** Thank you for the generous offer! We will be following up with you on it.

### **Funding Outlook and Requirements related to Funds**

**Q.** I understand that future projections call for a reduction in CDBG funds. A realistic overview of availability of future funds would be helpful. What amount of funds is expected in the next funding round?

**A.** Despite a generally downward trend in CDBG funding at the federal, CDBG funding rose 4% during this year's federal allocation (Newton Fiscal Year 2014, Federal Fiscal Year 2013), as cuts were made in other parts of the Department of Housing and Urban Development budget. Due to sequestration and an expected Continuing Resolution from Congress, the National Community Development Association, the professional and advocacy organization for community development based in Washington, D.C., is expecting a 10% cut to the CDBG program for the next fiscal year. This is a broad estimate due to the current uncertainty in Washington of the future for all discretionary funding programs, such as CDBG. An expectation of cuts to the CDBG program by 10% across the board is what the City has been estimating moving forward and for the next five-year plan. A 10% cut to the current allocation translates to \$1,586,457, from \$1,762,730.

**Q.** What amount or percentage of these funds are committed to ongoing projects or are expected to be used to complete or supplement existing projects or programs?

**A.** No funds are currently allocated for FY16 and beyond. Each year the City completes an Annual Action plan that budgets funding to certain projects. The Consolidated Plan process informs staff on the needs and priorities to serve households with low to moderate incomes and guides the development of the Annual Action Plan for each of the next five years. Staff presents the draft Annual Action Plan, developed with public input through the City's Citizen Participation Process at an annual public hearing of the Planning and Development Board.

**Q.** What restrictions or limitations would there be on the spending of the remaining CDBG funds? Will the funds be divided and spent in different Wards or Villages of specific designated areas? Are the use of the funds restricted to a designated area or can they be used anywhere?

**A.** Federal regulations establish certain caps or limits on CDBG funds. There is a cap of 15% of the total allocation on providing funding to human services activities, and a cap of 20% on administration. Federal regulations require that our funding for target neighborhoods must only go to the parts of the City with the greatest need, identified by those census block groups with the highest percentage of residents with low to moderate incomes.

The location of where funds are spent depends on the program. Human Services, housing, and accessibility projects can be completed anywhere in the City. Neighborhood Improvements and Economic Development projects currently occur within target neighborhoods, which are identified to create an “area benefit.” Economic Development has the potential to assist low- to moderate-income businesses anywhere in the City if the Consolidated Plan process determines the need exists.

Target Neighborhoods are determined by using the upper quartile equation, which has been established by HUD as a means of identifying the greatest need within a community. There are 63 census blocks in the City of Newton. None of these local census blocks meet the 51% low-income threshold used by HUD needed for these areas to be eligible for funding improvements. HUD allows communities which otherwise qualify for funding due to high concentrations of aged housing stock to use an “exception rule” for neighborhood improvements. This “exception” allows the City to use the greatest concentration of low-to moderate-income census blocks as its Target Neighborhoods. Census blocks that fall within the upper quartile (top 16 census blocks) that have the highest concentration of low- to moderate-income households are eligible. The City of Newton then goes one step further and reduces the amount of Target Neighborhoods to the top eight with the greatest need. This is how the four current Target Neighborhoods were delineated. In this upcoming Consolidated Plan process, HUD will provide updated income statistics that could result in the movement of the Target Neighborhoods to new areas of the City.

**Q.** Does the Mayor have any preference as to spending for civic/social programs or civic/infrastructure programs?

**A.** It is important to the Mayor that the outcomes for people be positive ones and that available dollars are used wisely and judiciously to benefit as many needy recipients as possible. Each year the overall needs of the City are assessed and appropriate actions are prioritized in the City’s Capital Improvement Plan. They vary from year to year and priorities may shift based on needs at the time.

- Q.** Does the Planning Department have any preference?
- A.** The input of citizens through the Consolidated Plan's public engagement and the data-driven needs assessment will inform the discussion between a variety of stakeholders as to where funds should be targeted. The Planning Department will collect this input and assess how to optimize results based on current needs before making recommendations.
- Q:** How does the CDBG portion of the budget compare to the City's budget as a whole?
- A:** The City's FY14 Budget totaled approximately \$331 million, while the amount of CDBG funding received in that same fiscal year totaled \$1,762,730 or .5% of the City's budget. While CDBG funding makes up a very small portion of the funds the City receives, the specific nature of who should be served by CDBG funds, households with low to moderate incomes, make it an important resource in meeting needs within the City.
- Q:** Is there a way we can exceed the 15% cap on human services the way exceptions are made for target neighborhoods?
- A:** The 15% cap or limit restricts the amount of funding that can support human services activities and is set by federal regulation, [§570.201\(e\)](#). In accordance with this regulation, up to 15% of the annual allocation of funds, as well as 15% of any program income received (funds repaid through loans, e.g., a housing rehabilitation or a microenterprise loan) can go towards human services activities. The only exception to this limit is for communities that exceeded the 15% cap in 1983, which can continue to fund their human services activities up to their 1983 percentage. Newton did not exceed the 15% cap in 1983, so the City abides by the 15% cap on the allocation.

### **Specific Project**

- Q:** What are the plans for the new playground [Pellegrini Park]? The basketball courts, the kids loitered at night, and the courts were closer to Hawthorne Street. If they are coming back, they need to be close to Hawthorne Street, so as to be seen, so they don't get into trouble. [sic throughout].
- A:** The new playground at Pellegrini Park, 11 Hawthorn Street, includes a new playground with rubber safety surfacing, a half basketball court in the front of the park, a shade structure for picnics and events, as well as new landscaping. In development of this design the staff and neighborhood residents have discussed with the Police Department about increased enforcement of this location, as well as looking at improved lighting during evening hours. Staff will be monitoring the use of the park throughout the first year to assure it is safe and to follow-up if needed.

## **Miscellaneous**

**Q:** Are there any plans to update and improve the Senior Center?

**A:** Plans for improvements to the Senior Center in the near term involve building maintenance and operations. Work is planned on the air handler system to improve air quality, and an insulated vestibule will be installed in the rear of building to provide a weather-protected area where people can wait for rides. In the longer term, sprinkler installation and fire alarm upgrades, window, door, and roof replacement and restoration, and repointing and repairs to the building envelope are planned.